The Pathetic Fallacy

Edited by Easy Sloman

KEEPSAKE NO. 14

PUBLISHED FOR THE SILVER ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DEATH VALLEY '49ers
AND FOR THEIR 25TH ANNUAL ENCAMPMENT
DEATH VALLEY, CALIFORNIA
NOVEMBER 8, 9, 10, 11, 1974

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1968—Edward P. Jones

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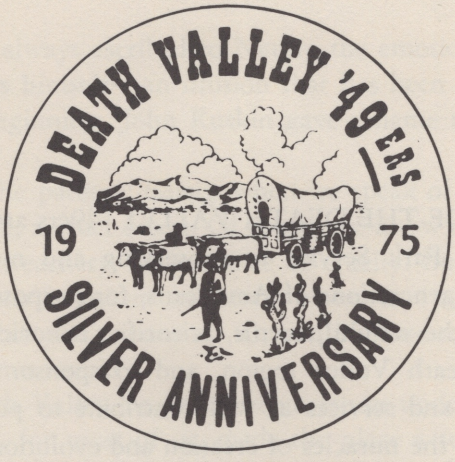
1971—Paul W. De Decker

1972—Dean Lemon

1973—William H. Newbro

* Deceased

The Pathetic Fallacy



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THE PURPOSES OF THE DEATH VALLEY '49ers are primarily to work with the National Park Service in conserving and making accessible to present and future generations of Americans, for purposes of education and enjoyment, all of the natural, scenic, scientific, historical and recreational facilities of the Death Valley region, and to sponsor and promote such institutions, events and services as will contribute to public understanding and appreciation of the miracles of creation and evolution as revealed in the desert and mountains of the Death Valley area.

The Pathetic Fallacy

Mankind has always ascribed to Nature the emotions and motivations he suffers or enjoys himself—an illusion that has been of use to poets and writers since the beginning. John Ruskin gave a name to this: the Pathetic Fallacy.

We exercise the pathetic fallacy when we speak of a treacherous path, a benevolent Nature, a cruel desert. Of course we know that in Nature, only Man is capable of treachery, benevolence or cruelty. But Nature and many of her manifestations arouse in us certain emotions (probably none of the three enumerated, but don't count on it), and it's hard to keep in mind that these emotions are not requited.

We love Death Valley, and the circumstances under which we achieve that affection have, for most of us, made the place a reasonable object for affection. Its beauty has not, for most of us at least, been marred by the Valley's capacity for inflicting everything from mild discomfort to the ultimate discomfiture.

So it is that we look upon Death Valley as a place of awesome natural beauty, as the setting for a history of high adventure and low buffoonery, as a source of material riches and of spiritual exaltation, and as a great place to bring the kids in the camper for a long weekend.

Even those who know this desert best are inclined to forget sometimes how Death Valley got its name. This Keepsake, it is hoped, will serve to remind us of the beauty and the history, the riches and the poetry of Death Valley, with only a small reminder at the end of the peril inherent in the pathetic fallacy that sometimes leads us to feel that our affection for this place is reciprocated.

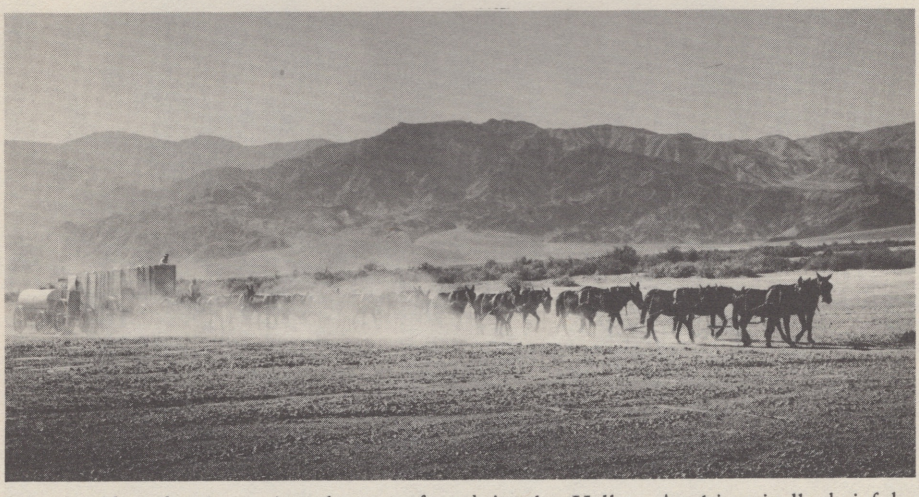
It is the purpose of the Death Valley '49ers to protect and preserve Death Valley for the enjoyment and the edification of the public. Let us not, in pursuing this purpose, forget the uncomfortable fact that Death Valley is a fool-killer, nor that that is just as it should be. We cannot and should not make the Valley safe for fools; what we ought to do is discourage foolishness.

Death Valley doesn't care one way or the other. We do.

One veteran of many seasons in Death Valley snorts when he hears The Devil's Golf Course mentioned: "If the Devil ever leaves his nice comfortable country club in Hell to come here and play golf, there'll be loud laughter in Paradise."

The view at Zabriskie Point is one that few who visit the Valley can forget.

To this uncompromising, inimical land came men who sought only to traverse it and depart: the '49ers seeking a way to the gold. These latter-day trekkers (above) are re-enacting a part of the historic saga of those first white men to cross Death Valley. The re-enactment was itself of some historical note; it took place at the 1949 centennial celebration of the original '49ers discovery of Death Valley, when the Death Valley '49ers organization was founded.



Later, gold and other minerals were found in the Valley. An historically brief but colorful period was that during which borax was hauled from Death Valley in huge wagons pulled by 20-mule teams.

Not all of Death Valley's scenery looks forbidding. Deceptively seductive are the softly contoured sand dunes shown here with the Panamint Mountains in the distance. They're just as perilous as the sands of the Sahara.

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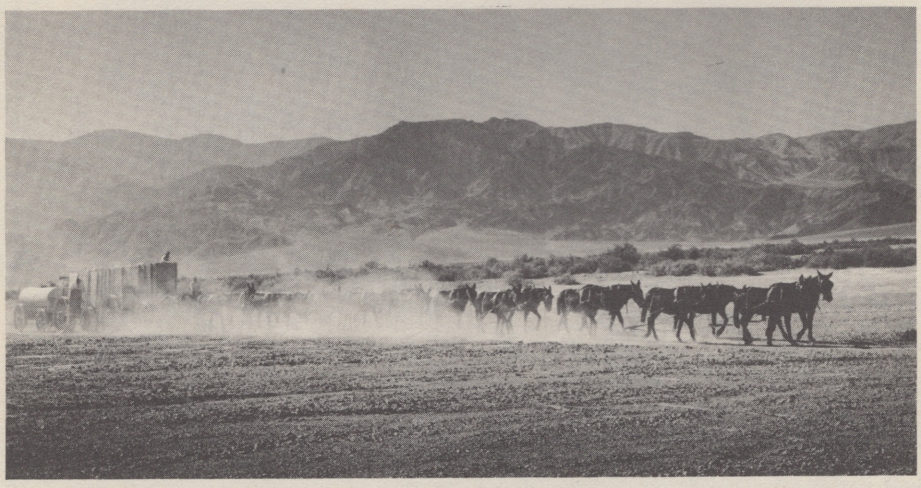

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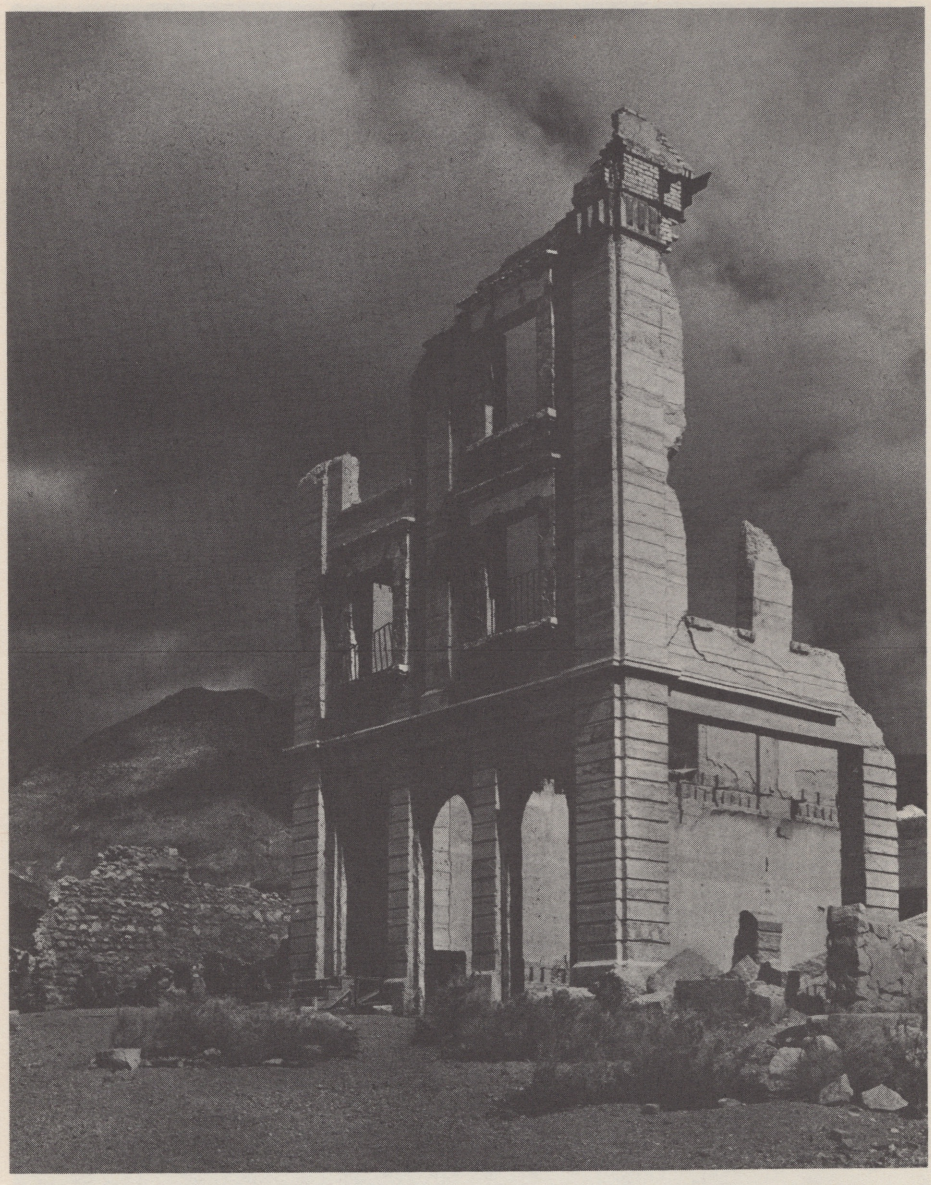
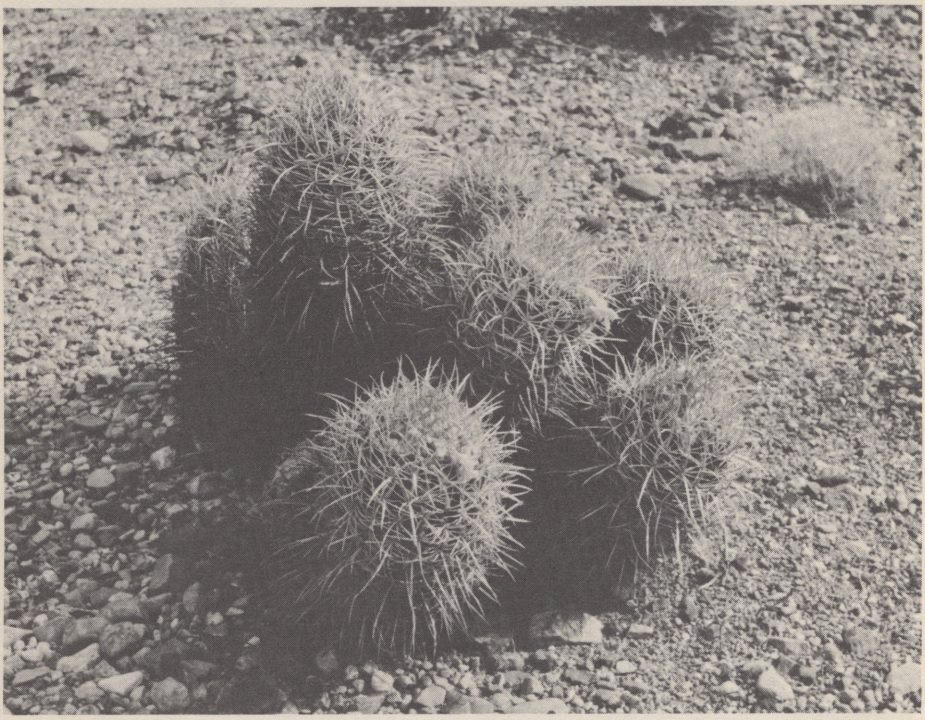


Wherever man goes he leaves traces of himself. Sometimes they are only a track in the desert, sometimes the structures he makes. This crumbling structure in Rhyolite probably once held dreams of permanence—but now it stands as a monument to the ephemeral dreams of wealth that characterize the rise and fall of Death Valley's ghost towns.

On the other hand, not everyone who came to Death Valley sought permanence. The imposing hostelry on the opposite page took note of the fact that certain members of the town's commercial and industrial community took only temporary residence in Leadfield.

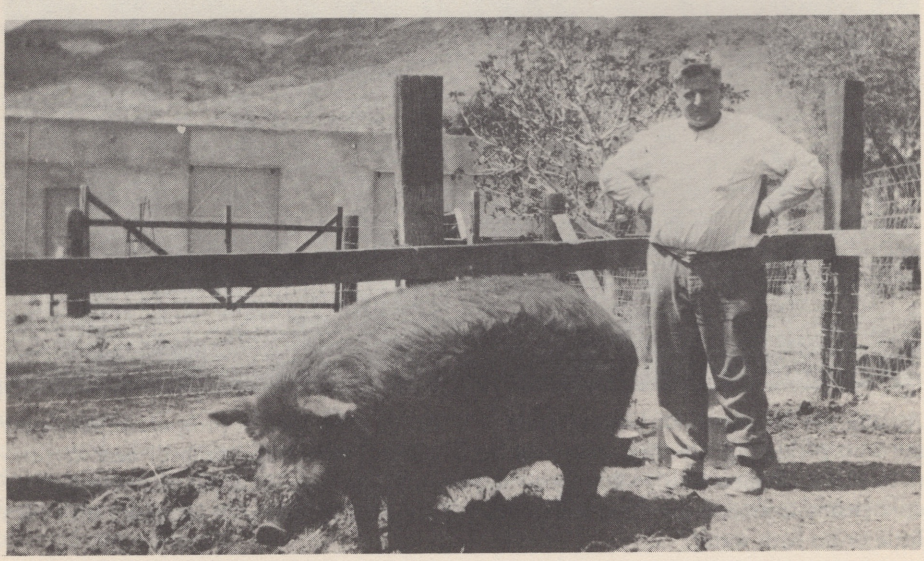
Fragile as the works of man may be, life is even more fragile in the harsh ambience of the Valley. Thus it is that we may feel a tiny catch in the throat as we note the valiant effort (there's that pathetic fallacy again!) of this desert holly to cling to its meager existence on the cracked, baked bottom of a primordial lake. It's no bed of roses for the young cactus on the opposite page either; even the desert-adapted cacti find Death Valley inhospitable.



Representing two periods in the history of Death Valley are Princess White Feather and Captain R. A. Gibson. The Shoshone Indians who first occupied the Valley established their small settlements near the few water sources; Cap Gibson, who drove a 20-mule team for U.S. Borax when he was somewhat younger, has retired from mule-skinning but remains active in the Death Valley '49ers and other historically oriented organizations.

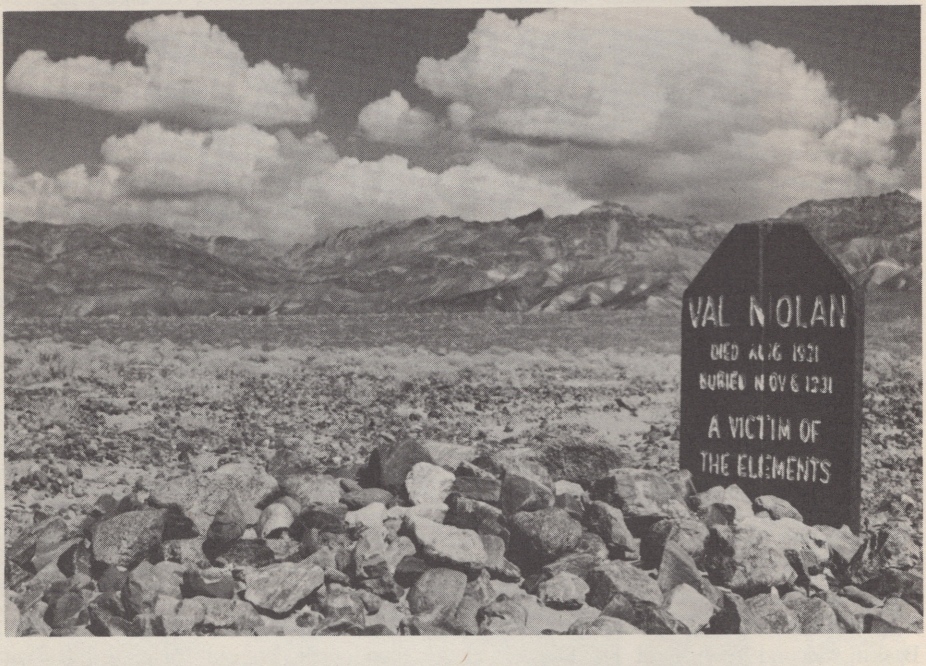
Among the old-timers of Death Valley was Seldom Seen Slim, a prospector and desert rat who picked up his nickname because of his infrequent appearances near civilization. His nickname fails to convey to those who never met him the distinct olfactory aura that surrounded the man, a result of the fact that his life style provided him with little or no bath water.

Probably the most famous denizen of Death Valley was Death Valley Scotty, who developed around himself a legend of wealth taken from a secret mine. He actually supported his opulent (for Death Valley) life style with money given him by a wealthy friend. Scotty's importance was not as a living hoax, however; he did more than anyone else did to invite attention to Death Valley and its remarkable character. Here he is seen in two unusual situations; as far as we know he never drove anything but an automobile, and he never showed the slightest interest in raising crops, livestock or anything else but a lot of dust and a little hell.



The majestic background of the mountains doesn't change, but the activities of the visitors do. Where Indians camped and mule teams hauled borax away, where prospectors trudged, the Death Valley '49ers now invite tens of thousands of visitors to the annual Death Valley Encampment. Among the events featured at the Encampment is the outdoor art exhibit, devoted mainly to subjects close to Death Valley, but "whose counterfeit of Nature hath serv'd but to enhance Nature's virtue more."

A rare photo of a gathering of the elders—the board of directors of the Death Valley '49ers—deserves to be immortalized here. Taken in 1971, the photo shows most of today's board (plus one or two members who have been gathered). For the record, they are (left to right): Front row: Jack Stoddard, Bob Logsdon, Leo Moore, Tom Baskin. Second row: Paul De Decker, Hazel Henderson, Harold Ihrig, Ralph Fear, Merle Wilson, Ed Jones, Dean Lemon. Third row: Dick Crowe, Hugh Tolford, Chalmers Grahom, Jack Steiber, Tom Clements. Fourth row: Howard Chuman, Capt. Blenman, Geo. Jansen, Tom Mathew, Bill Newbro, Charles Ward. Fifth row: Ross Dorsett, Elmore Nelson, Trevor Povah, Ardis Walker, Bob Murphy, Palmer Long, George Koenig.



No one knows how many men have perished in Death Valley because they forgot, for a little while, the kind of respect for the Valley that is needed to survive. No one can govern the elements here, but anyone can—if he will—avoid situations that end in an all-out confrontation with them. Whatever amenities have been brought there, the name of the place is still Death Valley.

DEATH VALLEY '49ER KEEPSAKE PUBLICATIONS

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P. 5 FLOYD B. EVANS F.P.S.A. (Top)
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P. 7 R. CHALMERS GRAHAM F.P.S.A.

P. 8 E. P. JONES A.P.S.A.

P. 9 FLOYD B. EVANS F.P.S.A.

P. 10 R. CHALMERS GRAHAM F.P.S.A.

P. 11 LEO MOORE A.P.S.A.

P. 12 FREDERICK L. RICHARDS

P. 13 FLOYD B. EVANS F.P.S.A.

P. 14 FLOYD B. EVANS F.P.S.A. (Both)

P. 15 FREDERICK L. RICHARDS (Both)

P. 16 BOB LOGSDON F.P.S.A.